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Thesis

ASPECTS OF DEMOCRACY IN EMERSON'S ESSAYS

by

George Khiralla

(B.S., Boston University, 1938)

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Only a very few years ago the United States was shocked into the realization that democracy, as an ideal and a way of life, faced a threat. Today all over the world, new governments are being established; an empire appears to be in the first stages of dissolution; and a great new power with a non-democratic political philosophy has come into being. As a result the world has been divided into two opposing camps. On the one hand the United States is sponsoring democracy in two countries and has given one country its complete independence. On the other hand Russia is seeking to spread its own political and social doctrine, using the centuries-old imperialist principle of expansion: complete centralization of power at home and abroad, a calculating and tenacious policy of conquest.

Since the word "democracy" is neither fetish nor magic charm, a better understanding of the ideal of democracy will, perhaps, aid in its advancement. And this seems right; for history indicates that the desire of people for freedom and equality is an unquenchable part of human nature.

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Democracy involves more than political systems and processes; it involves economics, sociology, philosophy and science as well. And since literature records the thoughts

and actions of men, one may inquire into it and seek men's indicated acts and thoughts. Emerson has been chosen because he, better than any other man, represents the turning point from the old America to the new. Rebelling against the older rationalism and idolatry of the state he spread his gospel of the infinite worth of the individual and the equality of all men. He heralded the new America and, in fact, was the direct spiritual ancestor of some of the best that is in modern literature as exemplified in the works of Whitman, Dickinson, Sandburg, Benét, Frost and Steinbeck.

The general plan of this thesis will include a brief historical view of democratic and non-democratic elements in Hebrew, Greek, Roman and English life; a selection of passages from a number of Emerson's essays that are pertinent to the subject of this thesis with special consideration of his "Politics"; and a view of modern concepts of democracy.

I shall not attempt to define democracy; rather, I shall set down some of the ingredients pertaining to democracy as I understand it. The history of democracy reveals a constant and universal demand for liberty, freedom, and equality.

The degree of democratic realization has varied from period to period and from society to society, from the

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fierce, primitive desire for complete liberty existing in the Arab world today, for example, in which little cooperative action is found, to the more or less integrated and socially conscious Anglo-American world. Further, democracy requires a clarified relationship between the individual and the state; between individual and individual who fully realize the place of democracy in men's consciousness. There is a recognition of the right of men to life, liberty, and happiness consistent with the best interests of mankind. The individual and the group need a sense of security, of recognition of individual worth. Opportunity for a self-realization should be present at all times and in all places. Correlative to self-realization is the realization of the mutual interests of individuals and groups in a freely interacting society. In his long historic struggle for freedom of thought, of speech, of action, of press man has shown his desire and need for democracy.

Democracy, as a political process, is not an end in itself. It is a means, only, for the attainment of a number of things including liberty, equality, and freedom. Democracy, in this sense, is the best method so far devised by man to secure these ends.

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For the historical material of Chapter I, I have relied heavily upon Fountainheads of Freedom by Irwin Edman and A Short History of Democracy by Alan F. Hattersley.

Chapter I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC IDEA

For the historical material of Chapter I, I have
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and A Short History of Democracy by Alan E. Hasty.

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It is the purpose of this thesis to examine the democratic idea and ideal as they appear in the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson. But democracy, as idea and ideal, has a long history and many variations and developments. Consequently, it is advisable to set the Emersonian conception of democracy against a background of antecedent and subsequent democracies.

My plan is to treat of democratic ideals as they exist in different periods and in different places, with especial emphasis upon the Emersonian concepts. A dictionary definition of democracy is an impossible task; for once it has been confined to the rigid framework of definition, its meaning will have changed. Ideas and objects are better understood and appreciated in the light of their history; for development and change act upon and react to previous events and concepts.

The period from the time of the Hebrews to the Levellers of mid-seventeenth century England will be reviewed briefly. But, since England was the direct spiritual ancestor of Colonial politics and sociology in America, the period from the Levellers to Emerson will be treated more fully. The infant Republic of the United States had retained

According to this law, then, health instruction in the schools should be in the form of factual teaching of physiology and hygiene.

Importance of Study: Education in the health field is an obvious necessity if one were to glance through some statistics on disease and accident prevention and control. It can be said quite fairly that, by educating the masses of people, the knowledge of facts and understanding of principles are indispensable for the maintenance of health and the prevention of diseases. It seems, therefore, that the school is in the best position to provide this education for the greatest number of people.

If health deserves the highest rank in the cardinal principles of secondary education, it seems reasonable to believe that a great deal is being done in the schools to make this principle really function. This study then will give some idea of the value that the schools actually place on health.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND WHY THIS PROBLEM WAS SELECTED:

This survey is to gain information relative to the instructional procedures involved in the program of health education in the public high schools in Massachusetts. In view of the variability in practice and the problems confronting school authorities in many localities, it is desirable to secure reports with respect to present procedures and suggestions for the improvement of existing plans.

much of the thought and experience of the English and
colonial world. It was into this heritage that Emerson was

born. At the same time a young and expanding America
played with intense directness upon his consciousness.
Elements of democracy appeared in the bilateral

compact between Jehovah and His people. He promised
prosperity: a land overflowing with milk and honey. In
return the people promised to keep His law. Here was the
rule of law. All men were equal in the eyes of God, were
equal before His law. But "all men" was restricted in
meaning, for it referred to the small Hebrew community that
believed in Jehovah. Hebrew monarchy itself was subject to
popular critical opinion and to the divinely instituted law.

The Greeks held varying views on the subject of
democratic ideas. Pericles believed in the ideal of a
universally shared happy versatility of public merit in
which all men shared equally. But he set mankind into three
rigid categories: the inferior group, in whom appetites
predominated, performed the menial work and took no part in
administration of social affairs; the middle group,
essentially generous in nature but incapable of grasping
the concept of the universal -- these were the defenders of
the state, the soldiers; finally, there was the philosopher-
king group who were capable of comprehending the concept of

the universal. Plato denied the infinite variability of men and their equality.

Aristotle favored a moderate democracy in which a few ruling experts were to be held in check by the many. "The ~~Many~~" included only a small middle class. In practice, the Greek city-state was an enlargement of the family concept. Each citizen was a member of the larger family; the city-state. He was, in reality, a functional unit of the larger body and was expected to take his turn in the judicial and administrative affairs of the city-state family. There was no dividing line between the citizen and the state. But slaves and certain tradesmen were excluded from this family circle. They were considered to be naturally inferior and, therefore, unworthy to be free.

The basis of Roman written law was natural law which, in turn, was a fixed manifestation of reason; for reason was at the heart of nature. Law was supreme. The stress was upon justice before impersonal law and upon the consent of the governed. Universal equality of mankind rested upon the foundation of correct reason; and men formed a cosmopolitan society. These concepts were derived from the Greek Stoics and put into practice in the Roman State. The Romans, however, drew a line between the

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citizen and the state. Roman citizenship was a matter of political and civil rights.

The Hebrew, Greek and Roman practices considered above may be placed in their context as follows: Hebrew -- during the time of Samuel, Greek -- during the time of Pericles, Roman -- during the time of Cicero.

Saint Paul considered faith in Christ as the basis for equality and liberty. To enter into a universal democracy, one had but to believe in Christ. Whereas the Romans used national law to create a state, Paul relied upon the spiritual brotherhood of men in Christ.

In the Middle Ages the monarch was considered to be an agent of God, but only an agent. He had to rule according to divinely instituted natural laws of justice. The Church acted as check upon the king on the basis of the idea of natural justice as recognizable by human reason in all men. For this task the church had been appointed by God.

One of the first to fight for English liberty was John Wyclif, who in 1365, opposed the pope's attempt to collect English tribute promised by King John 150 years previously. Wyclif claimed that a nation possessed the same rights as an individual; nor could a spiritual power be sovereign over an independent country. The individual had the right of his opinions on the basis of the Scriptures and

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of reason. He could put his opinions into practice by forming an association with other individuals. Tradition of Church and State were unimportant; and their authority, improper.

This political manoeuvre started movements in Germany and in England that were to result in the Reformation. Foreign authority had come up against the stone-wall of a new and vigorous English Nationalism. The nation (king) and the individual were just beginning to become vigorously aware of themselves. Presently the individual would develop a greater self-awareness and revolt against the national head himself.

Later (1517-1520) Martin Luther evolved the concept of the "priesthood of all believers". In this denial of the need of a priest to act as mediator between God and man, Luther proclaimed all men equal in the sight of God. By faith men became free. The inalienable right of everyone of God's children was spiritual freedom.

The Middle Ages gave way to the Renaissance and the Reformation. The static and "stable" foundations upon which men had built their world were washed away by the tide of new discoveries and new ways of thinking.

In 1647 the Levellers agitated for human rights as distinguished from property rights and inaugurated the

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battle for English liberal democracy that was to continue with varying degrees of success for the next two centuries. The people had now entered into the English political arena, at the instigation of the independent Levellers, the first political democrats.

The "Agreement of the People" resulted from the political debates that led up to the Puritan Revolution of 1647. The debates took place between the officers and the representatives of the common soldier in Cromwell's army. Each group recognized and admitted government by representation, But the question was asked: was "the right to choose the representative one that belongs only to the wealthier citizens, those who pay the taxes, those who have a 'local interest' in the government; or is it a natural right belonging to all men, a 'birthright' of all Englishmen?"

The following quotation is from the "Agreement of the People" as drawn up by the Levellers:

IV That the power of this, and all future Representatives of this nation is inferior only to theirs who choose them, and doth extend, without the consent or concurrence of any other person or persons, to the enacting, altering, and repealing of laws; to the erecting and abolishing of offices and courts; to the appointing, removing, and calling to account magistrates and officers of all degrees; to the making of war and peace; to the treating with foreign

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states; and generally to whatsoever is not expressly or impliedly reserved by the represented themselves. Which are as followeth:

1. That matters of religion, and the ways of God's worship, are not ~~at all~~ entrusted by us to any human power, because therein we cannot remit or exceed a tittle of what our consciences dictate to be the mind of God, without wilful sin; nevertheless the public way of instructing the nation (so it be not compulsive) is referred to their discretion.

2. That the matter of impressing and constraining any of us to serve in the wars against our freedom, and therefore we do not allow it in our representatives; the rather because money (the sinews of war) being always at their disposal, they can never want numbers of men apt enough to engage in any just cause.

3. That after the dissolution of this present Parliament, no person be at any time questioned for anything said or done in reference to the late public differences, otherwise than in execution of the judgments of the present representatives, or House of Commons.

4. That to all laws made, or to be made, every person may be bound alike, and that no tenure, estate, charter, degree, birth or place, do confer any exemption from the ordinary course of legal proceedings, whereunto others are subjected.

5. That as the laws ought to be equal, so they must be good, and not evidently destructive to the safety and well-being of the people. These things we declare to be our native rights, and therefore are agreed and resolved to maintain them with our utmost possibilities against all opposition whatsoever, being compelled thereunto not only by the example of our ancestors, whose blood was often spent in

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vain for the recovery of their freedoms, suffering themselves, through fraudulent accommodations, to be still deluded of the fruit of their victories, but also by our own woeful experience, who, having long expected, and dearly earned, the establishment of these certain rules of government, are yet made to depend for the settlement of our peace and freedom upon him that intended our bondage and brought a cruel war upon us. (1)

Significant is the fact that the people stood before the government and dared to speak. This document was "popular" rather than "baronial" like the Magna Carta, signed by King John at Runnymede in 1215. While the latter document had benefits that accrued to the people: trial by jury; habeas corpus; purse strings of government in the hands of the Common Council; yet it was primarily an expression of nobility pitted against the royal head. The "Agreement" was the voice and action of the people; it was fundamental to English political democracy.

Many political tracts were written during the English Civil War period. The general theme was liberal democracy. Even the conservative Hobbes felt the stir of individualism, and although he preached the absolute sovereignty of government he claimed that sovereignty only upon the basis of protection of individual interests and

1. Edman, Fountainheads of Freedom, 285-7

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upon law and order. A "monstrous power, monstrously absolute" was the only force capable of preventing men from preying upon each other. Order required loyalty to this central power. Interest in the common man was being publically proclaimed. It had become important to stand for the individual.

But the Levellers worked upon the principle of free assent in religion and consent of the governed in government. Religiously, they opposed a national church of appointed priests. Religious as well as political leaders were to be chosen by popular vote. Every man in England, big or little, had a life to live. No government that forbade him a voice had any hold upon him. Parliament was merely the instrument of the people called into being by the popular voice. Government was not set up to perpetuate and protect property rights above persons. Vested interests were not consonant with the present age which had fought to stamp out "exorbitances, molestations and arbitrary power." (2)

The Levellers argued for a written constitution; but monarchy was soon to return to England and the Levellers to be ousted politically. Yet they had forwarded the concept of natural rights as inalienable and "rights of

2. Ibid., 64

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individuals as guaranteed against all authority, even that of their own representatives."

John Locke had caught something of the spirit of the Levellers. And in 1689 he wrote two papers that were to have a significant influence upon democratic tradition: Letter of Toleration; the two Treatises on Civil Government.

In general, Locke assumed a natural state in which peace, mutual assistance and preservation and natural justice acted as regulating factors. This state preceded all government and all society. The rights and duties pertaining to this state were inherent, intrinsic, and inalienable. The chief and most characteristic of the inalienable rights was the right of private property. "But even private property was to him a personal right and it was with the rights of persons and individuals that Locke was chiefly concerned." Locke was the first philosopher to treat government as an agency to insure to the people "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"; the first to insist upon these rights and on the duties that they implied. Although he discarded the concept of innate ideas, he heartily endorsed the concept of the self-evident character of personal rights. (3)

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of personal rights. (3)

Empirically, rights seem to be generated by the structure of a society and duties seem to be those obligations custom breeds or law can enforce. Locke thought differently and it has become part of the American tradition to think differently. Ancient justice (Roman) conceived of law in terms of a common or public good, but Locke's liberal democratic doctrine stresses universal parity of private rights, of individuals who provisionally yield their independence to society and to government only that their independence and individuality may be guarded. (4)

The notions of individual rights as inherent and individuality expressed in terms of personal and private liberties were fundamental concepts of both of Locke's Treatises on Civil Government. His distrust of too much government found echoes in American democracy, notably in Jefferson.

Locke was too far away from the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century to see the social significance of property. Theories of inalienable rights of property and the notion of free enterprise were useful to the dominant economic interests and manufacturers as against the greater number of individuals with lesser power but with equal rights.

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4. Ibid., 71

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Locke was too far away from the industrial Revolution of the 19th century to see the social significance of property. Theories of inalienable rights of property and the notion of free enterprise were useful to the dominant economic interests and manufacturers as against the greater number of individuals with lesser power but with equal rights.

Locke excited the integrity of the individual and distracted regimentation and bureaucracy. Government was

rather an instrument created by the "consent of the governed, of each of the governed." Government was an agent of society and revolution and overthrow of government was justified when that government be^ctrayed that society. But society was primarily a collection of individuals. And government and society were "agents of private interests -- of life, liberty and estate." Majority rule was the final authority; therefore, limits had to be set upon executive power.

Locke's contribution to the Whig and Liberal movement in England was great:

Government by consent, responsibility of the governing power toward the governed, government as furthering liberty, the paramount and ultimate sanctions of individuals. (5)

Rousseau belonged to the period of the Enlightenment and Revolution. He emphasized man's independence, privacy and love of moral solitude on the one hand, and men's love for living together in an organic society on the other. Inconsistency did not seem to bother Jean Jacques Rousseau at all. Consistent or not, he exerted a tremendous influence upon Europe and the United States that was to be. His primary doctrine was the "human being's pristine individuality." He regarded individuality as

5. Ibid., 74

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sacred; for to him the voice of the majority was not merely the voice of justice; it was the voice of God. (6)

Rousseau pictured the primitive state of man as one of full happiness: no clothes, no restrictions on freedom, no friends needed. Man lived on the generous bounty of nature.

But the modern world converted this naturally good man into a corrupt, miserable creature by its "civilizing influence." Innocence and happiness were lost in the sensuality and pernicious learning of civilization. A return to the simple life was the only solution. As a step in that direction Rousseau attacked the authority of the king and the church.

He proposed to create a new association in which the common will of the people was brought to bear upon any attacking force. Each person was to unite himself with the group and still obey himself. But man had arrived at a point where return to the original primitive state was impossible. "The human race would perish unless it changed its manner of existence." But rearward movement was impossible. The new state would have a general will, a personality. And a man would be an individual because he was

a citizen of the body politic. The ideal man then became the ideal citizen. Only in society could men become free. There would be fellowship in a common unitary society. (7)

To the democratic stream, Rousseau contributed brotherly enterprise, fellowship, association, privacy, simplicity, solitude.

The French Revolution appeared to many as the liberation of men from authority and tyranny. To others it meant the end of order and tradition and security.

Among the former were Coleridge, the early Wordsworth, Shelley and Godwin all of whom felt that, at last, the "perfectibility of the individual could be achieved in a free society." (8)

Godwin rested his hope upon the gradual educative process rather than upon revolution. Perfection was to be achieved through reason. Social institutions were the hindrances upon the mind and spirit of man. Government was needed only where reason and justice were wanting. But a free and educated nature expressed reason and justice naturally. There was no need for government.

7. Ibid., 81

8. Ibid., 91

10. Ibid., 90

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7. Ibid., 31

8. Ibid., 31

Godwin's philosophic anarchism based its hopes upon the idea that each man is potentially a wise man. Reason and the abstract universal benevolence would impel men to see all men as neighbors, to treat all men as equals. (9)

Shelley believed that men were naturally good, innocent and kind; that institutions were destructive to their native kindness. Love and beauty, these two would transform the world. Beauty awakened love; and reason directed it.

He looked upon man as capable of perfection.

But perfection was possible only in a perfect society.

Tyranny and superstition had to be removed for these were destructive to love and beauty. Therefore, society's foundations had to be shaken hard enough for the annihilation of the superstructure of form and maxim. And in its stead a new culture raised. Shelley compared the present society to his ideal society. In much the same manner, Emerson and Thoreau caught a glimpse of a new, great society in transcendental moments and compared the imperfect existing world with their vision. But they had set up a beacon for themselves. (10)

9. Ibid., 94

10. Ibid., 96

It was true that the American democratic idea had its roots in the pre-American past: the revolutions in England and the pioneers of the French Revolution; the concept of natural rights, the inherent dignity of the individual; society as modeled after the eternal moral pattern of reason and justice. The Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights owed much to Locke, Rousseau and Montesquieu to name only a few. Consent of the governed, sovereignty of the people, majority rule, were old concepts when the American Republic came into being.

Yet the ideas of liberty and equality, in time, took on an American flavor. The vast unknown continent and the comparative absence of established castes, economic and religious, were significant. Individuality in the pioneer West became more than a word; it became a religion. Individual initiative counted more than position in a hierarchy. Each pioneer set individual liberty high in the moral order. Emerson transformed the pioneer's initiative and liberty into a transcendental self-reliance. To the pioneer they were conditions of survival. They had to believe in themselves individually and in all men. A vision was created in which the conditions of American pioneer liberty might be extended to all men -- given similar conditions.(11)

11. Ibid., 134

But the idea of the equality of all citizens and the ideal of the sacred sovereignty of the people came not with the constitution but with the era of Jefferson and Jackson.

Jefferson rested his case upon majority rule in an agrarian society. Natural justice worked on the side of the majority provided that the people's discernment was sharpened by education. So Jefferson spent a portion of his life in planning an educational system for the state of Virginia.(12)

"Jacksonian democracy came out of the West." This was the ideal of the common man and of leaders who were of the people. A classless society existed in the West; and self-reliance was everything -- tradition, nothing. With Jackson the electoral college no longer elected the President. Popular presidential elections came in. The population was The People.

Liberty came in with the American Revolution; civil equality, with Jefferson; and the will of the People, with Jackson.

Among American men of letters, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman sponsored individualism in America. All men were created free and equal; in all men preeminently burned

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Among American men of letters, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman sponsored individualism in America. All men were created free and equal; in all men presently burned

a divine spark; contemporary institutions stifled these attributes. Emerson and Thoreau frequently criticized American political institutions as destructive to personality and longed for individualistic democracy. Yet, while Emerson looked with stern disfavor upon institutions, he favored progressive improvement of government on the basis of the greatest good to the greatest number. He knew that his ideal government would not come overnight and hoped by the educative process to lead men to a gradual improvement of society. As I shall indicate in the last chapter of this thesis, Emerson was in full accord with modern liberal thinking.

Ranging far afield in search of ideas, Emerson combined non-American concepts with the practical individualism of American life and emerged with an individualized philosophy. His fundamental faith was not in democratic government but in character -- in the "infinitude of the individual." Faith in character suggested the equal divinity of all men, a divinity that would become evident if individuality were permitted to flower. He was a persistent and bitter critic of institutions and regimentation; for they hindered the flowering of individuality.

The individual was not a ballot or a cog in a potential machine or even a member of a state. He was primarily a soul. The concept of the "intrinsic dignity and intrinsic resources and possibilities" (13) of character, Emerson shared with the German Romantic philosophers and with the English Romantic poets, Coleridge, Shelley and Wordsworth. The Romanticists had revolted against the "mathematical clarities and deadening materialism of the Enlightenment." They exalted the ego, the impulse, the creative character of the self. The individual was born again. (14)

Until about 1820, the influence of Locke and Bentham had been almost complete: "all innate ideas were denied and morality was based on custom and utility." Most of the English Unitarians belonged to this school. Materialists, they believed in mechanical revelation. However, a new tide of idealistic philosophy appeared and was made effective in the German Romantic philosophy and in the English Transcendentalism.

Coleridge introduced German idealism into England. Emerson took his inspiration in part from there. The hold

13. Ibid., 145

14. Ibid., 146

of Locke and Bentham weakened. Coleridge argued for the innateness of ideas and for a faculty which transcended both sense and understanding. Morality became identical with religion; they had their source in intuition. Reason -- the transcendent faculty -- was the immediate seeing of supersensible things. Coleridge objected to the term "faculty" as applied to reason; for reason was not to be considered as the personal property of any human mind. Men did not possess it but shared in it. Reason was a spark of Universal Reason as it entered the human mind. All intelligent beings shared in it; and it was identical in them all. Emerson used this concept in explanation of the Oversoul.

Wordsworth gave to Emerson the idea that nature was alive with the Universal Spirit; it embodied the Universal Reason and its outward expression was law and order. German thinkers confirmed these ideas. Herder identified religion and intuition. Genius, expressed in the great man, constituted the world's chief progressive force and the source of all rightful activity.

All of the German philosophers of this movement ardently preached individuality. Each soul was a new expression of Universal Reason. Since the "real source of truth is intuition, we must look inwardly, rely on reason as

it speaks to us; and not outwardly, to history and social customs." (15)

Emerson did not hold with the concept that the state rested upon the fact of Natural Order; and its laws, upon a Natural Law. The state was something new in the nature of things, something new under the sun. Since it grew out of men's actions and was man's answer to the solution of particular problems, the state was not superior to the citizen. The state was created for the citizen not the citizen for the state for it was a much a result of human action as was a written document. It was alterable and fluid, without root or center; for any strong will might become, for a time, the motivating and guiding power of the state. Cromwell was such a strong will; Plato was another.(16)

15. Cooke, Emerson, 53

16. "Politics", Essays, 199

Chapter II

THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

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Running through his essays like a bright connecting thread is Emerson's individual philosophy, described by F. I. Carpenter as pragmatic mysticism. (17) Mr. Carpenter suggests that "pragmatic mysticism is essentially the American philosophy" or "the American Dream"; since a mystical belief in the possibility of a good life in America led to its founding and continued to motivate Americans from the Declaration of Independence, written by an idealist and based upon an act of faith, to William James and John Dewey.

Up to the time of James and Dewey no attempt at philosophic systematization had been attempted. Emerson himself disclaimed the title of "philosopher" when he announced that he was too young yet by some ages to compile a code and declared his metaphysics to be to the end of use, only. He recognized that the transitional and revolutionary character of the times in which he lived did not favor soul systems, all of which were apt to freeze into grotesque patterns.

17. Carpenter, Introduction in Emerson, XXIII

It will be helpful to remember that Emerson's philosophy arose out of his own modified view of the Christian religion. A recognition of the concepts of emanation and of evolution are indispensable to a proper understanding of Emerson's philosophy. Emerson took up the old Plotinian emanation theory, modified by later mystics and by the "inner light" concept of the Quakers. God was thought of as "a reservoir of spiritual energy." Religion was "the emanation of this energy from its divine source, and its influx into the individual life, enriched and illuminated that life." Thus it is evident that Emerson should emphasize the spirit rather than the letter of the religious law; personal experience rather than formal tradition; and education rather than prohibitions.

As a philosopher, Emerson was an idealist but never one who denied the reality of matter. Reality lay in the fact of experience which was of two types: mystical and sensory. There were two kinds of fact: physical and spiritual. Life itself was composed of sensations and states of mind which were unified by man's consciousness. The soul existed independent of and prior to organism and constituted the Me; Nature, which was all else, was the Not-Me. This view of the universe, Emerson believed to be superior to that of the materialist.

The materialist insists on facts, on history, on the force of circumstances and the animal wants of man; the idealist on the power of Thought and Will, on inspiration, on miracle, on individual culture. (18)

While both materialism and idealism were natural modes of thinking, the idealist's way of thinking was in higher nature. The idealist conceded the impressions of the senses and their coherence. But did the senses report the whole story? Were facts as reported by the senses the only facts of the world? Emerson believed that there were spiritual facts which were not discerned by the unaided senses.

The soul perceived and revealed the truth in much the same way that we know when we are awake. It was not the supersensitive of religious experience of the religious enthusiasts that yielded mystical experience, it was rather the simple, universal experience of every common man with nature which by its discipline educated man through his experience, served as the bridge between soul and world. Soul and nature were necessary to each other and could not exist separately. The soul's function was to recognize the relationship between particular facts and events in nature

18. Emerson, "Man the Reformer" in Essays, 229, 230

20. Emerson, "Circles" in Essays, 302

and seek a unitary view of reality.

In addition to viewing nature as interrelation, Emerson saw nature as process.

Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material, but is also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other's hands for the profit of man. The wind sows the seeds; ...the plant feeds the animal; and thus the endless circulations of the divine clarity nourish man. (19)

Cities, schools, churches and systems of government were but manifestations of ideas that have changed throughout the history of man.

There are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees. Our globe as seen by God is a transparent law, not a mass of facts. The law dissolves the fact and holds it fluid

 Every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series. Every general law only a particular fact of some more general law presently to dissolve itself. There is no outside, no inclosing wall, no circumference to us. The man finishes his story, -- how good! how final! how it puts a new face on all things! He fills the sky. Lo! on the other side rises also a man and draws a circle around the circle we had just pronounced the outline of the sphere. (20)

19. Emerson, "Nature" in Essays, 13

20. Emerson, "Circles" in Essays, 302

By intuition the universe was knowable. The infinite soul of man was capable of perceiving, intuitively, the infinite world of God. Intuition to Emerson meant that God was immediate in the philosophic sense: direct union of man's soul to the soul of God. And since all men were capable of intuition, they were equals. On the basis of intuition a man knew his tasks and privileges, and planned his actions without regard to society.

Speak what you think now in hard words and tomorrow speak what tomorrow things in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said today. A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. (21)

This concept was in harmony with Emerson's idea of universe as process. Not only was nature in process of change but man's understanding of nature changed as well. A change in man required a change in his actions and in his words. Emerson was thinking of consistency to a particular stage in a man's development rather than consistency to previous, outmoded ideas.

Democracy as a manifestation of an idea would then be not static but dynamic. Democracy today, to be consistent, would conform to the economic, political and philosophical

ideas of today. A modern democracy that conformed to abandoned ideas of a previous century would be foolishly consistent.

Moral Law stood at the center of nature; and every natural process was one facet merely of the greater moral structure. Moral Law applied at all points of action and of thought. Nature was completely moral. Nature was to Emerson "a discipline of the understanding in intellectual truths."

Our dealing with sensible objects is a constant exercise in the necessary lessons of difference, of likeness, of order, of being and seeming, of progressive arrangement; of ascent from particular to general; of combination to one end of manifold forces. (22)

But nature had another aspect: it was intellect precipitated.

In the divine order, intellect is primary; nature secondary; it is the memory of the mind. That which once existed in intellect as pure law, has now taken body as Nature. (23)

Consequently nature, our concept of it, represented a standard of human progress. A nature conceived as poor and

22. Emerson, "Discipline" in Essays, 36.

23. Emerson, "The Method of Nature" in Essays, 197

24. *op. cit.*, 45, 47

sordid mirrored a like intellectual state of man. A divine nature showed man as divine and infinite. And until man saw the universe as divine, he was only potentially divine. The individual needed to raise himself to a high spiritual level before he **became worthy** of conducting the affairs of the state. The people in their existing condition were not fitted for self-government.

Emerson was a partial democrat, a democrat in the process of becoming. His requirements were too restricted and unrealistic. Not everyone is intuitively endowed. Emerson's democracy did not square with the nature of the people about him. He looked for a state in which the majority of the people were great men. This was "aristocratic" democracy.

Emerson specified the type of individual needed to create the ideal state. One had to have genius. And genius consisted in complete belief that one's own thoughts were true not only for the thinker but for all men. How often have the works of genius echoed one's own rejected thoughts?

We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that ~~divine~~ idea which each of us represents. It may be safely trusted as proportionate and of good issues, so it be faithfully imparted, but God will not have his work made manifest by cowards. (24)

God had selected a place in the universe for each individual. To accept this place one required a full, firm self trust; for that position might be small or great. No use to have planned a career. Intuition guided each person to his proper level. This was Emerson's "transcendent destiny." He visualized those who accepted their destiny as members of a brave army advancing, under the aegis of the Creator, upon "Chaos and the Dark," and thus flooding the newly won ground with the light of knowledge.

How was one to know whether his nature and his actions were good? Emerson perceived intuitively that one moral law activated everyone to moral action: a moral stimulus evoking a moral reaction.

There is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same and to all of the same. He that is once admitted to the right of reason is made a freeman of the whole estate. What Plato thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand. Who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be, for this is the only and sovereign agent
 Of the works of this mind history is the record. Its genius is illustrated by the entire series of days. Man is explicable by nothing less than all his history. Without hurry, without rest, the human spirit goes forth from the beginning to embody every faculty, every thought, every emotion which belongs to it, in appropriate events. But the thought is

always prior to the fact; all the facts of history preexist in the mind as laws. Each law in turn is made by circumstances predominant, and the limits of nature give power to but one at a time. A man is the whole encyclopedia of facts. The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn, and Egypt, Greece, Rome, Gaul, Britain, America, lie folded already in the first man. Epoch after Epoch, camp, kingdom, empire, republic, democracy, are merely the application of his manifold spirit in a manifold world. (25)

Emerson seemed to believe that democracy was inevitable, for it was the culmination of the preordained way of life.

What was the rationale of self-trust? Emerson always looked for a universal factor to rely upon.

The inquiry leads us to that source, at one the essence of genius, of virtue, of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct. We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition, whilst all later teachings are intuitions. ... First we share the life by which things exist and afterwards see them as appearances in nature and forget that we have shared their cause. Here are the foundations of action and of thought. ... When we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams. (26)

Emerson's democracy, then, did not imply complete freedom. There was reliance upon something primary, there

25. Emerson, "History" in Essays, 3, 4

26. Op. cit., 64

were limitations. It could not fall under the criticism of George Santayana for example.

The liberty they (parties and nations beyond the pale of English liberty) want is absolute liberty, a desire which is quite primitive. It may be identified with the love of life which animates all creation, or with the pursuit of happiness which all men would be engaged in if they were rational. Indeed, it might even be identified with the first law of motion, that all bodies, if left free, persevere in that state of rest, or of motion in a straight line, in which they happen to find themselves. (27)

Important to a functional democracy was Emerson's concept of the relationship between man and the over-all or Universal Intelligence. Traditions or dicta or texts were no longer sacred. Worship of the past as the past was condemned. Emerson turned his back upon the past and looked ahead. Man was to live in the present with his eyes turned to the future and his mind attuned to the Supreme Intelligence. This was man fulfilled, completely himself, free. Self-reliance was really God-reliance.

Emersonian self-reliance could well shake modern society off its foundations.

27. Santayana, Character and Opinion in the United States, 214, 215

28. Emerson, op. cit., 77

It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their associations; in their property; in their speculative views. (28)

But one can hardly expect self-reliance to set in too great a degree. There seems to be an inert drag in the cultural field similar to that in the physical world. In the cultural world, physical inertia becomes cultural lag. Yet to meet the demands of a changing world democracy will perhaps need to set its feet back to the past, its feet in the present, its face to the future.

As a unit of the larger social body, the Emersonian man was affiliated with other men by spiritual bonds.

Thought answered to thought in obedience of the "great instincts."

I am certified of a common nature, and other souls, these separated selves, draw me as nothing else can. They stir in me the new emotions we call passions; of love, hatred, fear. In all conversations between two persons tacit reference is made, as to a third party, to a common nature. The third party or common nature is not social; it is impersonal; it is God. And so in groups where debate is earnest, and especially on high questions, the company become aware that the thought rises to an equal level

28. Emerson, op. cit., 77

29. Emerson, "Considerations by the way" in Conduct of Life 116, 122

in all bosoms, that all have a spiritual property in what was said, as well as the sayer. (29)

This "wisdom of humanity" was the common property of all men of all ages. Great men accepted it thankfully without trying to name it or claim it. A unity of thought and duty and power possessed men in society. As a result a greater wisdom was achieved. Men were thus made man; and individuals, into self governing bodies.

But what of the majority of the people in the United States?

Leave this hypocritical prating about the masses. Masses are rude, lame, unmade, pernicious in their demands and influence, and need not be flattered but to be schooled. I do not wish to concede anything to them, but to tame, drill, divide and break them up, and draw individuals out of them.

..... I do not wish any mass at all, but honest men only, lovely, sweet, accomplished women only, and no shovel-handed, narrow-brained, gin-drinking million stockingers or lazzaroni at all.

.....
To say then, the majority are wicked, means no malice, no bad heart in the observer, but simply that the majority are unripe, and have not yet come to themselves, do not yet know their opinion. (30)

29. Emerson, "Oversoul" in Essays, 276, 277

30. Emerson, "Considerations by the Way" in Conduct of Life, 249, 252

Emerson did not attempt to define democracy, but he did write about it as follows:

The root and seed of democracy is the doctrine, Judge for yourself. Reverence thyself. It is the inevitable effect of the doctrine, where it has any effect (which is rare), to insulate the partisan, to make each man a state. At the same time it replaces the dead with a living check in a true, delicate reverence for superior, congenial minds. How is the King greater than I if he is not more just?

Democracy, Freedom, has its roots in the sacred truth that ever man hath in him the divine Reason, or that, though few men since the creation of the world live according to the dictates of Reason, yet all men are created capable of so doing. That is the equality and the only equality of all men. To this truth we look when we say, Reverence thyself; be true to thyself. (31)

When I speak of the democratic element, I do not mean that ill thing, vain and loud, which writes lying newspapers, spouts at caucuses, and sells its lies for gold; but that spirit of love for the general good whose name this assumes. There is nothing of the true democratic element in what is call Democracy; it must fall, being wholly commercial. (I beg I may not be understood to praise anything which the soul does not honor, however grateful may be names to your ear and your pocket.) (32)

The "infinitude of the private man" was the center of Emerson's democratic concept. The individual was the

31. Emerson, Journals III, 369, 390

32. Ibid., VII, 221

equal of all other individuals for this reason alone. But the infinitude of man was in the future. And since this equality was only potential, it would appear that Emerson did not look upon his fellowman, any fellow man, as equal to himself in his own democratic society. In general, the individual's accord with society was only partially accomplished. The masses, the majority, were unworthy.

Shall we judge the country by the majority or by the minority? Certainly by the minority. The masses are animal, in state of pupillage, nearer the chimpanzee. (33)

Emerson could not go the full way with his famous contemporary, George Bancroft, who said:

There is a spirit in men: not in the privileged few; not in those of us who by the favor of Providence have been nursed in public schools: it is in man; it is an attribute of the race. If reason is a universal faculty, the universal decision is the nearest criterion of truth. The common mind winnows opinions: it is the sieve which separates error from certainty. (34)

But Emerson had a remedy. Democracy had as its supreme interest "the culture of men, the nurture of spirits." The state was a society of free men whose divine endowment appeared only when they were unfettered. In the true state, the wise man is the state.

33. Perry, The Heart of Emerson's Journal, 267

34. Schlesinger, The Age of Jackson, 381

Chapter III

THE POLITICAL DEMOCRACY OF EMERSON

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In 1844 Emerson wrote two masterful pieces which dealt with the subject of politics. One was originally a lecture read before the Mercantile Library Association of Boston on February seventh and published in essay form in April. He called it "The Young American." The other was his "Politics", based upon his Boston lecture series of 1839-40 on "The Present Age". This lecture, he revised and published in essay form in 1844.

In the former piece, Emerson emphasized the difference between his ideal of democracy and the means of achieving it. He placed love and goodness at the foundation of all human activity; and these were inevitable in the course of things. Stated as a law, it read, "You shall have everything as a member, nothing to yourself." This necessity of belongingness united the ultimate, perfect man, through the medium of the Universal Mind, with all other men and impelled them to act without the need for governmental prohibitions and exhortations. Emerson hailed the new movements in government and in daily living as a good sign.

All this beneficent socialism is a friendly omen, and the swelling cry of voices for the education of the people indicates that Government has other offices than those of banker and executioner. Witness the new movements in the civilized world, the Communism of France, Germany, and Switzerland; the Trades' Unions, the English League against the Corn Laws.... (35)

Emerson approved the over-all intent of these movements because he believed that they were founded in love and aimed at "securing to all their members an equal and thorough education." The value of the movements consisted not in what they had done but in what they foreshadowed, namely, a revolution in intent and in basic philosophy: to do good and to build upon the principle of love as motivation. Contemporary governmental and social action recommended conventional and conservative behavior and systems, all to the purpose of preserving the status quo whether good or bad. But those who attacked the status quo, capitalism proposed to make the poor man, himself, a capitalist. Obviously this was not a real remedy. The basic philosophy needed reorganization.

35. Emerson, "The Young American" in Nature, Addresses and Lectures, 380

36. Ibid., 395

37. "Politics" in Essays, 199

If only the men are employed in conspiring with the designs of the Spirit who led us hither and is leading us still, we shall quickly enough advance out of hearing of others' censures, out of all regrets of our own, into a new and more excellent social state than history has recorded. (36)

In the opening paragraph of his essay on politics, Emerson indicated that a state at any particular moment was nothing more than the cross section of a process in which laws and usages had been combined to meet particular cases. A state was not, as some people imagine, a rigid institution into which people had perforce to fit themselves; it was rather a changing movement which followed the lead of men of character. In other words, politics "rest on necessary foundations, and cannot be treated with levity." (37) For was not the wise man he who fitted in perfectly with nature and the Universal Mind? Politics was tied up to the Universal Mind through the medium of the wise man; and the code or the written laws of men were expedients to be used until a further movement in the state-process should require more appropriate laws. The code did not make the state or modify policy and modes of life. Therefore, such processes as commerce and religion were not to be voted in or out; they grew out of the character of the citizenry.

36. Ibid., 395

37. "Politics" in Essays, 199

Foolish legislation is a rope of sand which perishes in the twisting. ...the State must follow and not lead the character and progress of the citizen; the strongest usurper is quickly got rid of; and they only who build on Ideas, build for eternity; and that form of government which prevails is the expression what cultivation exists in the population which permits it. The law is only a memorandum. (38)

Emerson thought that the essence of contemporary political theory was the protection of persons and property. Since persons were identical in nature, all had equal rights and a democratic system followed as naturally as the ocean's tides follow the influence of the moon. But since property did not yield as readily as did persons to discernible principles, it was difficult to set it into the proper pattern; in viewing the present pattern human society sensed instinctively that the entire system of property rights was not valid and was therefore destructive to human character.

The problem of the true place of property in society was for Emerson a difficult one to decide; and if he had hoped that true culture would eventually take the place of foolish legislation, that love would replace destructive competition, it was to the law of Compensation which merged with the doctrine of Emersonian "fate" that he turned. He believed, as firmly as anyone in history ever did, in the immutability and universality of a law which manifested

38. Ibid., 200

itself in what he called polarity or action and reaction. He found many examples in nature: heat and cold, the ebb and flow of water, systole and diastole of the pulsating heart, every evil had its good.

This law writes the laws of cities and nations. It is in vain to build or plot or combine against it. Things refuse to be mismanaged long. 'Res nolunt diu male administrari.' Though no checks to a new evil appear, the checks exist, and will appear. If the government is cruel, the governor's life is not safe. If you tax too high, the revenue will yield nothing. If you make criminal code sanguinary, juries will not convict. If the law is too mild, private vengeance comes in. If the government is a terrific democracy, the pressure is resisted by an overcharge of energy in the citizen, and life glows with a fiercer flame. The true life and satisfactions of man seem to elude the utmost rigors or felicities of conditions and to establish themselves with great indifference under all varieties of circumstances. Under all governments the influence of character remains the same, -- in Turkey and in New England alike. Under the primeval despots of Egypt, history honestly confesses that man must have been as free as culture could make him. (39)

This concept was fundamental in Emerson's philosophy. He urged that men look for and recognize the stream of law, that they go along with its tide. "Our power consists not in abolishing or creating, but in transference merely." (40)

39. Emerson, "Compensation" in Essays, 100

40. Emerson, "Power" in Conduct of Life, 546

Emerson's conviction of the efficacy of the law of Compensation was, perhaps, a major factor in his optimism and high hopes for society. His hopes could hardly have been so high had he had to depend upon the earnest vigilance of elected magistrates to defend society and regulate its affairs with justice. Nor could he look to society itself with any glowing expectation, for society consisted largely, "of young and foolish persons" and the majority of the citizens of a state were ignorant and deceivable. It was good, it was in the nature of things, that men should look to the formidable natural defenses of society; for every item in society and in the rest of nature would have its just influence. Referring to the essential functions of government with respect to the protection of persons and property, Emerson held that "Things have their laws, as well as men; and things refuse to be trifled with. Property will be protected". Each atom in the universe required its just sway and its influence emanated from it as surely and as steadily as did the gravitational force from matter. Persons and property required "their proper force, -- if not overtly, then covertly." Should a law declare that property owners have no power, nevertheless, a higher law would dictate that property write every law respecting property. The term "property" in this context should not be interpreted to mean

"great estates," for Emerson spoke of the totality of property. Sometimes the poor outvoted the rich; but it was their accumulated property that exerted the greater influence.

The concept that a higher law wrote the statutes for each object, whether it was property or persons, remains important in the consideration of Emerson's thinking on politics and democracy. Emerson's "higher law" was at the center of all nature and governed all things through all of the mistaken and fumbling attempts at lawmaking by imperfect human legislators. Only when man shall have achieved full harmony with the center (which was moral in character) could he push aside the mysterious curtain that stood between himself and perfect understanding. At such a time the "infinitude of the private man" will have been achieved and the common unity of all men with the moral center will have been accomplished.

If Emerson's position on the question of democracy seemed uncertain and vacillating, it may be due to the fact that he looked upon the complexity of nature as a process, and democracy was undergoing a historic change in form. As a result he saw not merely one democracy but many democracies, one democracy growing out of its predecessor. There was a continual adjustment and readjustment upon the basis of the law of Compensation. Democracy was not an end but a means

only. To Emerson the end was complete understanding of nature in which question and answer would be one and in which the wise man functioned in accordance with and in harmony with nature's laws. Democracy was to him a means only, without the distorting aura of fetish and magic charm. Emerson would never have consented to a standardized democracy, one which had been lifted out of the context of its environment and put into a rigid frame to be worshipped. He knew that standardization resisted invigorating and necessary change, that standardization meant death. A modern English historian has commented upon the destructive effects of standardization. He calls it "the idolization of techniques" and quotes from Gerald Heard's The Source of Civilization as follows:

"Life starts in the sea. There it attains to an extraordinary efficiency. The fishes give rise to types which are so successful (such, for instance, as the sharks) that they have lasted and unchanged until today. The path of ascending evolution did not, however, lie in this direction..... A creature which has become perfectly adapted to its environment, an animal whose whole capacity and vital force is concentrated and expended in succeeding here and now, has nothing left over with which to respond to any radical change. ...In the end it can therefore beat all competitors in the special field; but equally, on the other hand, should the field change, it must become extinct. They were committed, could not readjust, and so they vanished." (41)

41. Toynbee, A Study of History, 327

Another analogue cited was the fight between David and Goliath. The latter had achieved many victories "in his panoply of casque and corselet and target and greaves." He could conceive of no other type of armament; for what he wears had in the past given him invincibility. He could visualize an Israelite foe only in comparable armor and thought such a foe foolhardy to match strength with him. But David used his own weapon better adapted for the new situation.

Down through the entire history of military warfare the standardized technique that was idolized fell before a more efficient and newer technique. The Homeric hoplite or the individual hero succumbed to the new, effective Spartan phalanx which in turn fell before the Athenian peltasts. The peltast was outmoded by Alexander's Macedonian order of battle; and the Roman Legion shattered the Macedonian order of battle. The triumph of innovation and process-minded strategists could be traced down to the present day of jet planes and guided missiles.

Emerson looked upon the universe as process, of democracies evolving out of democracies, of ways of life growing out of the ways of life. He could look with a clear eye at the many forms of government that men had devised. In the United States the form of government was determined

by a definite necessity which secured to the people of the country a particular type of democracy. This necessity determined the form and method of government in accordance with the people's "habit of thought, and no wise transferable to other states of society." He did not claim that democracy was preferable to other forms of government, but more fit for his day and country. Time and geography entered into the make-up of any government. Other countries might have required a monarchy or a council of rulers; but for the United States of the nineteenth century the proper form of government and way of life was democracy. But democracy was an infinite progression. Therefore, progressive education of men was necessary to enable them to reach that point in the process where all men will have achieved harmony with the moral center. At such a time government would necessarily disappear, for the wise man needed no government.

In this sense the progressive individualization of men made for greater unity rather than for a chaotic centrifugal individualism. Emerson's democracy was centripetal rather than centrifugal as some people fear. For all minds would be tuned, so to speak, to the all-directing and all-directed center.

To compensate for his harsh remarks concerning the citizen body, Emerson hastened to their defense in his remarks on political parties. He condemned parties as unprincipled; but the fault rests not so much on the people as on their leaders whom they follow in uneasy docility. It is interesting to note what a modern writer, Aldous Huxley, has to say about the docility of the people. Emerson's "docility" becomes in Huxley's book the "patience of common humanity."

The patience of common humanity is the most important, and almost the most surprising, fact in history. Most men and women are prepared to tolerate the intolerable. The reasons for this extraordinary state of things are many and various. There is ignorance, first of all. Those who know of no state of affairs other than the intolerable are unaware that their lot might be improved. Then there is fear. Men know that their life is intolerable, but are afraid of the consequences of revolt. The existence of a sense of kinship and social solidarity constitutes another reason why people tolerate the intolerable. Men and women feel attached to the society of which they are members -- feel attached even when the rulers of that society treat them badly. It is worthy of remark that, in a crisis, the workers (who are ruled) have always fought for their respective nations (i.e. for their rulers) and against other workers. (42)

42. Huxley, Ends and Means, 63, 64

So far as Emerson was concerned there were in general only "parties of circumstance and not of principle." The parties of circumstance had their base in local and personal interests and these interests stood in perpetual enmity to one another. Agriculture stood against commerce; capital, against the operator. The extraordinary party of principle generally had an auspicious beginning; but it always degenerated into personalities where narrow interests took hold and contaminated the whole. Religious sects, the party of free-trade, of universal suffrage, these were parties of principle. To prevent a party of principle from degenerating into a party of circumstance Emerson advocated planting not in local or momentary measures but in "deep and necessary grounds." For a moment he focussed his attention on the existing parties and the best he could say for them was that one had the best cause, the other had the best men. Their great common fault lay in the fact that both parties operated upon the motives of hatred and selfishness rather than upon the principle of love. To neither party was he able to turn for any hope of advancement in science, and humanity or art.

But Emerson was hopeful. He could not feel that the nation was at the "mercy of any waves of chance." He relied heavily upon the friendly laws of things which would

make everything turn out right in the end.

We must trust infinitely to the beneficent necessity which shines through all laws. Human nature expresses itself in them as characteristically as in statues or songs, or railroads, and an abstract of the codes of nations would be a transcript of the common conscience. Governments would have their origin in the moral identity of men. (43)

Ultimately it was the will of the wise man that determined the law. But since the wise man did not exist in nature, awkward attempts were made: popular vote, the double vote, the selection of one person as a leader to set up a government as he saw fit. In every government devised by man there was a fragment of an immortal government so that actual government symbolized an immortal one.

Like millions of men before him and millions more to come, Emerson strongly objected to taxes as the hardest of all debts to pay. Neither capitalist nor laborer felt that he was receiving his money's worth; for how could a man who had never seen Emerson tax him justly? This was one of the many instances in which one man performed an act which inevitably bound another. Compelling another to act after one's own views was a blunder of "colossal ugliness in the governments of the world." As soon as any person tried to

43. Op. cit., 208

gain dominion over his fellow, he lived a lie that hurt both parties involved. Therefore, "the less government we have the better, -- the fewer laws, and the less confided power." This abuse would vanish like a film of mist before a blazing sun if the real influence of private character were permitted and the growth of the individual allowed to go on unchecked. It was the task of nature and of the state to create the wise man; for the entrance of the wise man would be the signal for the disappearance of the state with its armies, and laws and money -- unnecessary items. And love would form the working basis of the political and economic and social systems. But the influence of character was in its infancy, and society moved and lived on a barbaric level. This observation did not crush Emerson or even seem to make him pause for breath; for he goes on to suggest that it must advance for "every thought which genius and piety throw into the world, alters the world."

With characteristic consideration for the dignity of the Common Man, Emerson, after having extolled the worth of the wise man, rushed to the rescue of society. He accused the most religious and the best instructed men of underestimating society. The initiate did not have "sufficient belief in the unity of things to persuade them

that society can be maintained without artificial restraints, as well as the solar system." They would not or could not believe that the private citizen might be a good neighbor unless he was constantly threatened with jail or confiscation. There had never existed in the minds of these few enough faith in the principle of right and love as foundations of a state. Emerson was unable to recall a single man in the history of mankind who had the moral stamina to oppose a law "on the simple ground of his own moral nature." Anyone who dared so act received the taunts and jibes of scholars and churchmen. Eventually, however, moral law must triumph; for it was in the nature of things that it should.

Chapter IV

MODERN DEMOCRACY AND EMERSON

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Emerson's democracy was not merely political in character but rather embraced all other fields of human activity at once. For example, in his speech entitled "The American Scholar" he referred to man thinking whose province extended from the center of his being out to the rest of the world. The important factor involved was this -- every man was entitled to every resource, be it natural or man-made, be it tree or earth or sky or law or book, in his search for perfection. By "every" Emerson meant exactly that. The student or "scholar" in listening to the address might easily envisage "every man" to mean student and "scholar" only. But Emerson meant every living person from bootblack to true scholar. In effect, this speech was not only a declaration of American literary independence; but, by virtue of its giving to the common man every right to which he was entitled, the rights to enter the domains of art and of culture and of free private inquiry, Emerson was broadening the base of democracy.

In Emerson's day and in the centuries extending backward, these rights "tended to be perverted to mere sectarian and class uses." It was upon the basis of the

restoration of these rights to all men that John Dewey has called Emerson the "philosopher of democracy." (44) And Emerson revealed his democratic perspective in essays with such diverse titles as "The American Scholar," "History", "The Oversoul" and so on, as well as in the essay that deals directly with the subject of politics namely, "Politics."

If Emerson stressed the individual and individualization, it might be well to remember that the culture of the eighteenth century apotheosized the state and counted the individual as nothing. Emerson reacted against this concept and even, perhaps, overemphasized the individual by attempting to change the world by development of the individual alone. Among the factors that made for the self-reliance of the individual in America was the expanding frontier of the West where individual effort was an absolute necessity for survival. Living in a revolutionary and transitional period, he saw a young giant called the United States grow beyond a seaboard where it was born and push with vigorous strides westward into a new and exciting land with infinite and unknown possibilities. Emerson reacted to it, cooperated with the development and shouted a very dignified word of cheer to the confident, personal

44. Matthiessen, American Renaissance, 4

accomplishment of the independent frontiersman. He was excited by the nation-wide affirmation of freedom of worship, freedom from political domination by the church and freedom of business enterprise. He saw a state that tried as much as possible to follow the principle of less and less government and hoped eventually for the disappearance of government regulation. His doctrine of the infinitude of the private man made him confident that the equality of all men would be realized, that the divine spark present in all men would burst into glorious flame, annulling the need for government; in this way he created a new world on the basis of individual achievable perfection.

The frontiersman, however, was not as self-reliant as he was pictured. His self-reliance was overemphasized as was that of the American of the twentieth century. For his part the frontiersman relied upon "the government for grants of land to support his institution and himself." His tools and weapons came from the rearguard civilization. The American of the 1920's was believed by people the world over to be at the pinnacle of self-reliance; but the depression brought out the fact that he was a social creature moving in a social context. If the social process ceased to function properly, man found that his very livelihood was endangered. He soon learned that he was a function of the social movement

as it was a function of himself. There was a definite and real interplay of forces at work. Man was what he was only because he functioned in a social group. Emerson would have said that man and society were an integral part of the totality of nature -- they were nature in one of its infinite manifestations as matter is a manifestation of energy.

Emerson lived in a generation that reacted violently against the eighteenth century's idolatry of the state and the subjugation of the individual to it. The flexibility of life in the United States generated by an exploding frontier and concentrated industrialism necessarily created a supreme faith in individual initiative. The individual was everything. This faith took on a characteristic American connotation: a faith deeper and broader than the first, faith in all men; for belief in one's self necessitated for the American mind a belief in all men and in the future of mankind.

Translated into practical politics and economics, individualism implied laissez-faire or a minimum of government regulations. But soon after the Civil War it became evident that narrow sectional and economic interests were to spell trouble for the principle of laissez-faire. Furthermore the new concentration of wealth and industrial power put the un - united working man at the mercy of the masters of the newly created wealth and power, large and small.

Democracy had entered a new phase and in so doing had acquired a new meaning and a new context. New methods and techniques of democratic action were needed. The individual found that social democracy and economic democracy and political democracy existed on unequal terms; and in order to bring about a total democracy he had to unite them into an integrated smoothly functioning system or way of life. He was led to the realization of the ideal of a united social action for a common human purpose. He discovered that even under a political democracy he could be the complete slave of a dictatorial employer on the economic level; or, on the social level, his circle might be limited to a particular language or racial or income group. He came up against the paradox of a multitude of petty despotisms in a somewhat politically democratic kingdom. The problem had left the domain of pure individualism. The question now became how was an individual's independence to be maintained in conjunction with an ordered security for all?

It was obvious that the meanings of such words as liberty and freedom and equality had to be re-examined; for while the symbol remained constant; the reality had changed. Emerson's suggestion that the meanings of things be sought in the present applied here. The outmoded

techniques of individualistic politics and economics were breaking down, and liberty was modified to meet the broadening base of equality among the masses of the people. Into the life of the common man there entered a multitude of social legislation, such as the world had never seen, to change the configuration of democracy. New questions were asked. How was the individual to have a more effective and rich life? How prevent the machine from oppressing the individual? How make government responsive to the will of the people? There was to be no waiting for the arrival of the wise man, no waiting until the masses be educated in accordance with Emerson's dictum. The time was now.

All through this period, democracy was being subjected to terrific stresses and strains by new inventions and old techniques, by the growth of cities. Liberty alone was found to be inadequate to insure equality; and economics cut a deepening wedge into the political scene. No longer did man feel that the individual must be freed from society. Man was society; it grew out of his very being; its values, out of his heart and brain. Values that men lived under were socially created. Freedom itself was a value socially permitted and socially achievable; and as a result the ~~tb~~nditions for effective freedom were to be brought about through the cooperative efforts of government and public, of

public and public and of government and government. Democracy required that all communities be free.

One of the outstanding spokesman for democracy today, John Dewey, has emphasized as did Emerson before him, the experimental approach to social and political problems: "only through a communication established between groups in society can shared interests and common goods be determined and realized." He relied upon the social group rather than upon the "unimpeded individual." (45)

The human end to be realized remained for John Dewey the development of human personality and the establishment of wide human relationships. Democracy as a way of life tried to form values that regulated the living of men in a society. Universal suffrage and periodic elections were factors in democratic government and were the means that had been found expedient for realizing democracy as the truly human way of life. These expedients were not a final value. Emerson called these things expedients as well, expedients to serve men's purposes until the wise man arrived.

Dewey suggested that all who were affected by social institutions have a share in producing and in managing them. This implied an uncommon faith in the common man.

45. Edman, Fountainheads of Freedom, 550

The democratic faith has emerged very very recently in the history of mankind. Even where democracies now exist, men's minds and feelings are still permeated with ideas about leadership imposed from above, ideas that developed in the long early history of mankind. After democratic political institutions were nominally established, beliefs and ways of looking at life and of acting that originated when men and women were externally controlled and subjected to arbitrary power, persisted in the family, the church, business and the school, and experience shows that as long as they persist there, political democracy is not secure. (46)

Recently public opinion was surveyed over a period of six consecutive years in as scientific a manner as it is possible today. The findings were published nationally.

The American public is far ahead of its legislators on most matters of legislation. The public is more willing to make sacrifices than its leaders suppose. The farm bloc does not speak for the farmers, nor labor leaders for labor. Few leaders have faith in the patriotism of the common people. The people accepted the principle of price control of wages and of other aspects of social and economic existence one year before Congress gingerly began debating the issue.

Continuous studies of public opinion show that if majority opinion had been acted upon more often -- or more quickly-- some of the nation's present headaches might have been avoided.

Nor is the public infallible. (47)

46. Ibid., 558.

47. Readers' Digest, 1 - 3.

While Emerson had little confidence in the people, yet his philosophy could have adjusted itself to the new changes in thinking. Emerson's democratic philosophy was an integral part of the trends and attitudes of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, he looked upon natural and man-made phenomena as processes. He rejected the static traditionalism and prior authority and therefore stressed the advancement of techniques on the basis of living in the present and the future. He brushed aside the killing "idolatry of technique" that had spelled death to so many standardized creatures in the long biological evolution of life, that had defeated nation after nation addicted to outmoded methods.

ABSTRACT

The modern concept of democracy is a result of the slow and irregular development of the ancient world. In Greece there existed a democracy of the people, an equality restricted to a certain class of citizens. The Hebrews alone were equal before the law, and the Greeks belonged to the exclusive aristocracy.

The Romans created the concept of universal equality and the basis of universal citizenship. The Roman-made code through the centuries has been the basis of modern society and civilization, requiring the recognition of universal rights and the formation of the individual and civil rights. These three principles are the basis of modern civilization. The first two systems excluded the non-Greek and the non-Hebrew world while the Roman restricted the activity to the political and civic fields of life. Concepts of economic and social equality had not entered into their thinking.

Christianity stressed belief in Christ as the basis for universal brotherhood. Religious faith was necessary for the Christian as for the Hebrew. The Middle Ages combined ancient and medieval ideas into a system of

ABSTRACT

The modern concept of democracy as an ideal has had slow and irregular development. Among the ancient Hebrews and Greeks there existed an elementary form of equality -- an equality restricted to a religious or a national group. The Hebrews alone were equal before the Law of God. Only the Greeks belonged to the exclusive city-state family.

The Romans created the concept of universal quality upon the basis of universal reason which wrote the man-made code through the medium of a natural law. Their society was cosmopolitan, requiring only that the individual recognize correct reason as the foundation of his political and civil rights. These three ancient systems were characteristically restrictive either with reference to groups or to their impact upon the total life of individuals. The first two systems excluded the non-Hebrew and the non-Greek worlds while the Roman restricted its activity to the political and civic fields of life. Concepts of economic and social equality had not entered into their thinking.

Christianity stressed belief in Christ as the basis for universal brotherhood. Religious faith was necessary for the Christian as for the Hebrew. The Middle Ages combined ancient and medieval ideals into a system of

divinely instituted natural laws of justice. The church was God's administrative agent.

The fourteenth century saw first **stirrings** of modern liberalism in the words of John Wyclif. He argued for the individual's right to his opinion on the basis of the Scriptures and of reason; and held the tradition of church and state to be unimportant; their authority, improper.

It remained for the seventeenth century Levellers, the first political democrats, to lay the foundations of modern liberalism in the "Agreement of the People." They held that laws should insure the safety and well being of masses of the people. The people were now furthering their own cause political equality.

The English Civil War period set moving a tremendous force for liberalism and individualism and swept many English and Continental philosophers along its stream of action. Hobbes believed that individual interests were primary and were best protected by a law and order that prevented men from preying upon one another. Locke assumed a natural state in which peace and mutual assistance and natural justice acted as regulating factors. However, differently these men fashioned the means, the end was the same: the protection of personal interests or personal rights. The notions of individual rights as inherent was becoming a part of men's

consciousness. While Hobbes advocated a strong central government, Locke distrusted too much government.

Individualism found strong supporters in such Europeans as Rousseau, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Godwin. The founders of the American Republic learned much of the older English liberalism and placed their faith in the laws of nature and the individual's access to reason as the basis for equality. Such phrases as "consent of the governed," "sovereignty of the people" and "majority rule" eventually came into daily use in the political field.

Individualism found abundant chance for growth in a vast unknown continent where established economic and social castes were absent. It was the era of Jefferson and Jackson that brought the idea of the equality of all citizens and the ideal of the sacred sovereignty of all the people.

Among other American literary men, Emerson took up the fight for individualism. Disdaining to write with logical unity, he opened himself to mis-interpretation by a world trained in logic. He relied upon the unity of spirit. Nature was at once a process and a vast symbol of the mind and as such was not subject to logical treatment. It was to the Universal Mind that men needed to turn; for if men opened their souls to it, their opinions took on the sanctity of divine origin. The great man was he who was most open to

receive the truth. When this condition shall have been reached, then the ultimate or true democracy will have arrived; and mankind will be united through the medium of the Universal Mind as a center. Present governments only detracted from this end. The real function of government was to train character for the purpose of creating the perfect man.

The basis of Emerson's equality of all men was reason. Divine reason was at the root of his democracy; and the only equality of men rested on this one truth that all men were capable of living according to the dictates of reason. Democracy did not mean vanity and loudness, or lying for gold or for political office; it meant action for the general good. That the ultimate and true democracy would materialize Emerson had no doubt. He was convinced of the efficacy of the Law of Compensation which refused to be mismanaged for long. There was a law for politics as there was a law for chemical reactions and the true democratic state would come to be just as surely as chemical processes followed the laws of chemical reaction.

Emerson's democracy extended out beyond the political to the economic and social fields as well. It was the privilege of all men to inquire into every aspect of life -- of art, of philosophy, of science. For this

reason John Dewey, called him the philosopher of democracy. If Emerson over-emphasized the individual, he was fighting against the eighteenth century worship of the state and rejoiced in the individual accomplishment of the American frontiersman.

After Emerson, democracy entered a new phase and acquired a new meaning. Intergration of all of life's activities were necessary because of the new industrialism. Had Emerson been able to see the twentieth century striving for inter-group activity he would have approved. Individualistic politics and economics were breaking down. Liberty alone was inadequate to insure equality; and the social groups with shared interests replaced the concepts of the unimpeded individual. The purpose of American democracy today, still based on the principle of love that Emerson advocated, is the development of human personality and the establishment of wider human relationships.

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